NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6035 JULY 26, 1978
BOB CHANCELLOR/NAIROBI

THE WALVIS BAY DEBATE

ANNCR:

A PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF SOUTHWEST AFRICA, OR NAMIBIA, AT THE UNITED NATIONS NOW APPEARS TO HINGE ON THE ISSUE OF WALVIS BAY. VOA'S BOB CHANCELLOR HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT

VOICE:

LIKE SO MUCH OF THE OVER-ALL ISSUE OF SOUTHWEST AFRICA, THE QUESTION OF WALVIS BAY GOES BACK INTO COLONIAL HISTORY. THE ONE-THOUSAND-SQUARE KILOMETER ENCLAVE IS SITUATED NEARLY DEAD CENTER ALONG NAMIBIA'S ATLANTIC COAST AND IS THE ONLY DEEP WATER HARBOR ALONG THAT COAST. AND SOUTH AFRICA CONTENDS THAT, HISTORICALLY, WALVIS BAY HAS NEVER BEEN A PART OF SOUTHWEST AFRICA.

INDEED, WHEN SOUTHWEST AFRICA WAS A GERMAN COLONY, PRIOR TO WORLD WAR ONE, WALVIS BAY WAS RETAINED AS A BRITISH PROTECTORATE, AND THEN LATER BECAME A PART OF THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA. THUS, SOUTH AFRICAN OFFICIALS CLAIM PRECEDENT ON THEIR SIDE WHEN THEY ARGUE THAT WALVIS BAY SHOULD N O T BECOME INDEPENDENT WITH THE REST OF THE TERRIROTY, BUT SHOULD REMAIN UNDER THE ADMINISTRATION OF SOUTH AFRICA'S CAPE PROVINCE. THE SOUTH AFRICANS, IN FACT, USE ONE OF THE FAVORITE ARGUMENTS OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY--THAT COLONIALLY-IMPOSED BOUNDARIES SHOULD N O T BE CHANGED. BUT THE SOUTHWEST AFRICA PEOPLES ORGANIZATION -- SWAPO -- WHICH HOPES EVENTUALLY TO GOVERN AN INDEPENDENT NAMIBIA, ARGUES THAT WALVIS BAY IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE TERRITORY AND MUST BE HANDED OVER WITH THE REST OF NAMIBIA.

FROM AN ECONOMIC STANDPOINT, WALVIS BAY IS ESSENTIAL FOR AN INDEPENDENT NAMIBIA. AND A SITUATION WHERE THE MAJOR PORT WAS HELD BY A POTENTIALLY ANTAGONISTIC SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT COULD CREATE WHAT THE SWAPO NATIONALISTS SEE AS AN INTOLERABLE SITUATION. IT WOULD ALSO GIVE SOUTH AFRICA A LOCATION FOR A MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE VERY HEART OF NAMIBIA, WHICH MIGHT OTHERWISE BE TEMPTED TO SUPPORT SOUTH AFRICAN LIBERATION GROUPS.

FOR A LONG TIME, DURING THE FIFTEEN-MONTH-MEDIATION PROCES BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICA AND NAMIBIA, THE WALVIS BAY ISSUE WAS N O T RAISED. ALTHOUGH SOME DIPLOMATS SUGGEST THIS WAS MERELY AN OVERSIGHT, OTHERS BELIEVE THE ISSUE WAS FINALLY RAISED TOWARD THE END OF THE NEGOTIATIONS TO PROVIDE AN EXCUSE FOR SCUTTLING ANY IMMINENT SETTLEMENT. THE MEDIATORS, THE FIVE WESTERN MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL, DECIDED TO AVOID MENTION OF THIS SEEMINGLY IRRECONCILABLE ISSUE IN THEIR FINAL SETTLEMENT PROPOSAL, WHICH WAS ACCEPTED BY BOTH SOUTH AFRICA AND SWAPO. BUT WALVIS BAY BECAME A HOT ISSUE AGAIN WITH THE CIRCULATION OF A U.N. RESOLUTION CALLING FOR STEPS TO ASSURE THE EARLY REINTEGRATION OF WALVIS BAY INTO NAMIBIA. THIS PROMPTED SOUTH AFRICAN ALLEGATIONS THAT THE WESTERN MEDIATING POWERS MIGHT - IN PRETORIA'S VIEW - DOUBLE-CROSS SOUTH AFRICA BY SUPPORTING SUCH A RESOLUTION.

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